'Florodora' Revival Recalls Romances of Original Sextet

The ORIGINAL FLORODORA SEXTETTE — *Left to Right* — VAUGHAN TEXSMITH, DAISY GREEN, AGNES WAYBURN, ELAINE SELOVER, MARIE WILSON, MARJORIE RELYEA *and* MARGARET WALKER

Famed Beauties in First Production Set the Pace in Marrying Millionaires—One Became a Peeress

NOTHING reflects the times so boldly as the theatre, since, as William Shakespeare once said, it is the vanity bag which holds the mirror up to nature. And no better illustration of how fashions and customs change could be found than "Florodora," the famous musical comedy, which the Shuberts will revive at the Century Theatre on April 5; it is not yet old enough to have passed beyond the memory of those who are now telling the present generation what to do, yet it belongs to that prehistoric period when five cent cigars were still acceptable.

The piece was first produced at the Casino Theatre on November 11, 1900, by Dunne, Ryley & Fisher, and though Owen Hall's book put in many a good word for itself and Leslie Stuart's melodies were soon being whistled, it was really the work of the sextet which enabled the producers to buy all the aforesaid cigars they wanted.

First Famous "Florodoras."

The young women in the original sextet at the start of the several years' run of the piece—the first families of "Florodora," so to speak—were: Marie Wilson, Agnes Wayburn, Marjorie Relyea, Vaughn Texsmith, Daisy Green and Margaret Walker. In singing the celebrated number, "Tell Me, Pretty Maiden," this was the order of their appearance in the sextet, reading from left to right, as they looked the audience full in the face. It was not the order of their disappearance from the sextet, however, the pretty maidens quitting the cast at various times to make rich marriages.

It would not be amiss to rehearse the history of the original sextet, since they set the fashion for show girls in marrying men of wealth and position—a fashion that makes the future loom as large as an income tax for the present sextet. The first of the six to marry was Miss Texsmith. She came from Texas, bearing the name of Smith, but when she joined the sextet she took the name of Texsmith, thereby making it easier to bear. She let go of her popularity to marry Issac J. Hall of Paterson, N. J., a wealthy silk manufacturer, and her good fortune proved the truth of the adage that it's the early bird that catches the silk worm. When Mr. Hall died a couple of years ago he left his property to his widow, who is now successfully managing his mills.

Another girl who quit the sextet early to go in seriously for matrimony was Miss Wilson, her husband being Frederick Gebhard, one of the Beau Brummells of the day, whose presence on Broadway was a sure sign that a first night was due. After her marriage Mrs. Gebhard became well known for her operations in Wall Street, having acquired a taste for the stock market by plucking $750,000 on a tip from James R. Keene, who was one of the big financial figures who figured about the Casino every evening. Eventually Mrs. Gebhard retired from the hurly burly, and built herself a country home at Chesterbrook, Fairfield county, Virginia, and a fine town house in Washington, whence she first headed for the sextet. Her husband died in 1910.

As a matter of fact, the matrimonial pace for the sextet was first set by Miss Relyea, who still retains the handsome looks that weighed down her end of the front row with pulchritude. At the time of the production she was already married to William Davis Holmes, a nephew of Andrew Carnegie, though the fact wasn't current at the time as one of the vital statistics of Broadway. On the evening of the opening of "Florodora" out of town, which occurred at New Haven four nights before the New York premiere, Mr. Holmes dropped dead in the Hoffman House, and Miss Relyea was thereafter the cynosure of all opera glasses as "the little widow of the sextet." Several years later she married Albert Stokes, a stock broker, and Mr. and Mrs. Stokes are now living here in the midst of plenty.

Ned Wayburn's Wife Was One.

Miss Wayburn was the first wife of Ned Wayburn, the stage director, from whom she was divorced soon after "Florodora" became attached to the city. She took flight early in the run and married a very wealthy resident of Johannesburg, where she has since lived, with an occasional trip to keep tabs on New York. She is a sister of Mrs. Richard Anderson, wife of the well known costumer.

Another maiden who grew in grace and married successfully was Daisy Green, who had to follow her prima donna aspirations out of the sextet before she caught matrimony. She went to London, singing with Alice Neilson and subsequently growing into one of the principal roles in "With the Money" in 1903 at the Casino. Eventually her fate overtook her in the person of a wealthy stock broker from Denver, and she left the stage to other voices.

The career of Margaret Walker carries few data for the precise historian beyond the fact that she is now living in Atlantic City, in itself something of an achievement. While the sextet of "Florodora" was in a class apart from the chorus, the latter group produced some young women who not only graduated into the sextet but into other varieties of publicity. One of these was Edna Goodrich, who virtually made her home in the Casino, since her mother played a small bit with the chorus. Miss Goodrich succeeded Miss Relyea in the gallery of goddesses, and has since attained fame as an actress on the stage and the screen and as one of the wives of Nat Goodwin.

Nan Patterson, Frances Belmont, Camille Clifford and Mabel Carrere were able to receive flowers as part of the only rival the sextet from "Lucia" has ever had. Miss Patterson was twice tried on the charge of having murdered Cæsar Young, a wealthy bookmaker, in a cab.

Camille Clifford married a son of Lord Aberdare, Henry Lyndhurst Bruce. At the time a story went the rounds that she had once done scrub duty in a Boston theatre; whether a fact or not, she was a beautiful and accomplished woman.

Frances Belmont is one "Florodora" celebrity who became a peeress; she is now Lady Ashburton. She was the daughter of a New York workingman and once lived in a Harlem flat. She appeared in London, after her success in the sextet, as leading woman with Charles Hawtry. Her husband's income when she married him amounted to $1,000,000 a year, and he, was lord over 60,000 acres in England, Scotland and Wales.

Brunettes were more favored in the betting in those days. In fact, blondes were so much of a drug on the market that the managers of the original "Florodora" were impelled to issue a statement concerning them, without reflecting in any way that their blondness was a drug on the hair. Because of the high mortality rate in the sextet due to marriage the managers started a waiting list of substitutes, and when this swelled to 500 and threatened to keep growing the producers issued this scale of working dimensions to save Broadway from clogging up with sextet aspirants.

"A girl must weigh 130 pounds, be 5 feet 4 inches tall, be long waisted and of willowy build, a pronounced brunette or else a real red head. Pure blondes with short waists are plenty enough, but we don't want them. The bright red headed girl is the hardest to find. We don't care whether or not they dance. We can teach them that, but we refuse to color them."

Although very little attention was ever paid to the men who sang and danced in the double sextet, they were part of the picture and contributed to the success. Some of them have since risen to distinction on the stage, notably so Shelley Hull, a brother of the husband of Margaret Anglin.

The present sextet reveals that theatrical taste has swung back to the tresses that have the amber tint of a light seidel of a bygone day. The new set of stage Graces are Madeleine Richers, Marcella Swanson, Beatrice Swanson, Dorothy Leeds, Fay Evelyn, Muriel Lodge, Dama Sykes and Vera Gibson—eight in all. Of these misses, who are all under 20, three are blondes and three are inclined to be titian haired, while only two furnish the dark brown face frame.

Mrs. Stokes's Extension Course.

To these girls Mrs. Stokes (Miss Relyea), in a recent chat that formed a sort of university extension lecture on how the original sextet managed to win such important matches, said that the chances for a girl's marrying a man of wealth to-day are even more propitious than ever, because the supply of millionlares now seems to be approaching the demand. However, the fact seems to be that the professional first nighters and the ubiquitous stage door Johnny are a race that is dying out.

In those days Stanford White, "Freddie" Gebhard and "Tom" Clarke, the father of Elsie Ferguson's husband, were part of the attraction of a show on first nights. They were known as "The Three Musketeers," and attended every opening in full force. They were conspicuous in the throng of Wall Street figures and artists of note who flocked again and again to see "Florodora," often taking the treatment as much as fifty times. Among the stage door Johnnies the practice was to wear a huge chrysanthemum in their buttonholes, a badge of their calling that was referred to by the ribald as "cold slaw." Some admirers rode grandly up to the theatre on bicycles, which the programmes of the day politely informed the hot young sporting bloods must be checked in the foyer. There are now no Berry Walls and Diamond Jim Bradys, no dandies to rule the styles, for New York since then no longer seems to like to regard itself as a small city with Broadway as its favorite suburb.

The girls in the sextet arrived magnificently at the theatre in hansoms. After their popularity was in full swing they sometimes gave entertainments after the show, and on Sundays at smart clubs and the better hotels and restaurants, such as Sherry's and the Waldorf-Astoria, thus adding to their taxable incomes. The present day demoiselle chooses to fly into pictures for extra exercise (and lucre); it's easier.

The salary of the sextet at that time was $30 per week, while the least that any of the present group gets is $75—typical of the way in which a bankroll shrinks nowadays in the presence of the footlights. They considered themselves rather fortunate, as the management bought all their costumes except their black gloves and stockings, while the ordinary show girl then had to buy her own dresses and consider herself lucky to have the money for them.

Since the recent actors' strike the management now purchases the apparel, which means that the modern chorus girl looks a good deal better fed than her forerunner. Moreover, the gowns for the new production, while costing much more than for the old, will be a lot simpler, though not refined to almost the point of non-existence, as in so many current musical shows. There will certainly be none of the hideous black gloves of the old costumes, nor the long trains to the dresses, the tight waists and large hips, the balloon sleeves, the expansive corsage and the exaggerated picture hats.

Another respect in which modern methods of speed and efficiency have been of benefit is in the matter of rehearsals, which in the original production dragged along for ten weeks, with the backers' money coming in spurts, but none of it going to the girls. The revival will be put on with about four weeks of training, and, according to the agreement referred to between the managers and the chorus girls' association, all rehearsals beyond that period must be paid for. In fact, the forthcoming production, though using the early score and libretto virtually unchanged, will be speeded up. No jazz will be introduced, for there are some things too sacred even for syncopation. The Shuberts plan to put more rapid fire byplay into the piece, and to keep the show girls more in movement during each act, for the aim of the earlier producers seemed to be rather to have the girls pose statuesquely, like Charles Dana Gibson beauties and look as though they were just waiting to have some one bring them an ice.

With a chorus which is to be half as large again as the original this production will cater to the current popular demand for solid phalanxes of femininity in musical shows. The initial presentation was still under the influence of the contemporary English taste, which enjoyed seeing a lot of healthy male creatures cavorting about in perfect time to music.

Much Stronger Vocally.

On the vocal side the new production promises to be much the stronger, in line with the prevalent desire to have the feet twitch rather than the ears at a musical play. Edna Wallace Hopper looked very stunning in the principal role of *Lady Holyrood*, but the only time her voice really spelled money in connection with "Florodora" was when she bought the house out herself one day so that all the girls could go to the racetrack and scream for their favorite in the Suburban.

Her part will be sung this time by Christie MacDonald. Eleanor Painter as *Dolores*, another major role, will throw the full weight of her fine octaves into the scale, and Irving Fisher will put some real notes into the character of *Capt. Arthur Doncgal*, a part which Cyril Scott sang without pretending to do more than talk it.

As interesting a sidelight as any on the way life has changed in the city is furnished by one of the original programmes, which afforded the information that one could buy Golden Rod beer ten years ago for $1.10 to $1.25 a case of twenty-four bottles, and Pommery Sec and Heidsieck could be obtained for $32.50 a case without any password. Tailored suits could be obtained from a firm in the old Sun Building, at 170 Nassau street, for $15, and if you went to Nassau and Ann street and looked Cohen & Co. straight in the eye with $25 in your hand they'd let you have a dress suit to order. Collars could still be had for 15 cents each, gloves that are now $10 were advertised for $1.50, and derby hats could be bought for $3, without having to buy them back from hat check boys afterward.

Moreover, one could lunch extravagantly in the sidewalk cafe of the Hotel Pabst, where the Times Building now is, for 60 cents, beer "compris."

Brunettes Were Favorites in Days When Broadway's "Three Musketeers" Haunted Theatres

Wonderful Japanese Paper

MUCH of what we envy in the artistic life of the Japanese cannot be attained by us because it is the fruit of a national education of several hundred centuries. We must also, in the domain of pure technics, give up trying to equal the Japanese where the perfection attained by them depends on natural products of the country that our own does not possess. Just as the production of the beautiful Japanese lacquers is directly dependent on the raw material furnished them by their own flora, so also the preparation of their paper depends on the incomparable quality of the material found in the bark of plants and mulberry trees that grow in their soil.

The Japanese plants are distinguished not alone by the advantages offered by the raw material. We must also take into account the mode of preparation, which in the course of the transformation of the flexible but strong tissue does not cut up the cells but softens them and separates their fibres by beating and stamping, as formerly, before the introduction of machinery, we treated flax.

The kodzu is one of the six most important plants whose bark is used for paper. The shoots of the first year are barked, and after the leaves have been removed furnish strips of several yards in length, which are cut into lengths of about a yard and tied into bundles. The bark is softened in running water and then gently boiled in water containing wood ashes. It is then treated with channeled mallets on thick wooden planks. The product is twisted and turned frequently under water until it becomes a pulpy mass. This pulp finally reaches the artisan, who transforms it into paper by the method which we have, so to speak, abandoned in our manufacture. The fibres are fastened together, not with animal glue but with a cement made of the roots of certain plants.

With the aid of a rectangular sieve of very fine bamboo fibres, the necessary quantity of pulp is removed, and after all the water has filtered through the sieve the leaf is partly dried, after which it is rubbed with a soft instrument on a plank and exposed to the sun until completely dried, when it is easily detached from the plank.

Japanese paper has many uses for which our paper is not fitted. It replaces in a surprising manner our window glass, the manufacture of which has only recently been introduced into Japan.

Domestic economy and costume make innumerable uses of paper. Extended in the form of cord it has astonishing strength. Gilt and cut into narrow strips it is used as embroidery. To it the Japanese braids owe their gentle brilliancy and that delicacy imparted to mediæval silks by their filaments of Cypress gold. Its incomparable constitution is closely connected with the Japanese arts of writing and painting, both of which use the soft brush where we employ the pen or the pencil. The paper, rapidly absorbing India ink, enables the writer to use his brush more freely and lightly on its surface than we can use our implements.